

Finding a Job and Evaluating a Job Offer

Finding information on available jobs

It often takes months of time and effort to find a job that matches your qualifications and desires. Actively pursuing multiple leads will maximize your search efforts and reduce the time it takes you to find employment. This means devoting as much time as you can to your job search. If you are unemployed, treat your job search like a full-time job, waking up early and working a full day. If you are working or in school, it is still important to devote time every day to your job search.

Inform people you know that you are looking for a job. Read the classified ads. Use the Internet, including general job search sites, special interest sites, company Web sites, and trade and professional association Web sites. Directly contact employers in which you are interested, even if they are not advertising a job opening. You may also wish to consult State employment service offices and to consider private employment agencies.

Where to learn about job openings

Personal contacts
School career planning and placement offices
Employers
Classified ads
—National and local newspapers
—Professional journals
—Trade magazines
Internet networks and resources
State employment service offices
Federal Government
Professional associations
Labor unions
Private employment agencies and career consultants
Community agencies

Job search methods

Personal contacts. Eighty percent of available jobs are never advertised, and over half of all employees get their jobs through networking, according to BH Careers International. Therefore, the people you know—friends, family, neighbors, acquaintances, teachers, and former coworkers—are some of the most effective resources for your job search. The network of people that you know and the people that they know can lead to information about specific job openings that are not publicly posted. To develop new contacts, join student, community, or professional organizations.

School career planning and placement offices. High school and college placement offices help their students and alumni find jobs. They allow recruiters to use their facilities for interviews or career fairs. Placement offices usually have a list of part-time, temporary, and summer jobs offered on campus. They also may have lists of jobs for regional, nonprofit, and government organizations. In addition to linking you to potential employers, career planning offices usually provide career counseling, career testing, and job search advice. Some have career resource libraries; host workshops on job search strategy, resume writing, letter writing, and effective interviewing; critique drafts of resumes; conduct mock interviews; and sponsor job fairs.

Employers. Through your library and Internet research, develop a list of potential employers in your desired career field. Employer Web sites often contain lists of job openings. Web sites and business directories can provide you with information on how to apply for a position or whom to contact. Even if no open positions are posted, do not hesitate to contact the employer and the relevant department. Set up an interview with someone working in the same area in which you wish to work. Ask them how they got started, what they like and dislike about the work, what type of qualifications are necessary for the job, and what type of personality succeeds in that position. Even if they don't have a position available, they may be able to put you in contact with other people who might hire you, and they can keep you in mind if a position opens up. Make sure to send them your resume and a cover letter. If you are able to obtain an interview, be sure to send a thank-you note. Directly contacting employers is one of the most successful means of job hunting.

Classified ads. The "Help Wanted" ads in newspapers list numerous jobs. You should realize, however, that many other job openings are not listed, and that the classified ads sometimes do not give all of the important information. They may offer little or no description of the job, working conditions, or pay. Some ads do not identify the employer. They may simply give a post office box to which you can mail your resume, making follow-up inquiries very difficult. Some ads offer out-of-town jobs; others advertise employment agencies rather than actual employment opportunities.

When using classified ads, keep the following in mind:

- Do not rely solely on the classifieds to find a job; follow other leads as well.
- Answer ads promptly, because openings may be filled quickly, even before the ad stops appearing in the paper.
- Read the ads every day, particularly the Sunday edition, which usually includes the most listings.
- Beware of "no experience necessary" ads. These ads often signal low wages, poor working conditions, or commission work.
- Keep a record of all ads to which you have responded, including the specific skills, educational background, and personal qualifications required for the position.

Internet networks and resources. The Internet is an invaluable resource. Use it to find advice on conducting your job search more effectively; to search for a job; to research prospective employers; and to communicate with people who can help you with your job search. No single Web site will contain all the information available on employment or career opportunities, so in addition to the Web sites listed below, use a search engine to find what you need. The different types of sites that may be useful include general career advice sites, job search sites, company Web sites, trade and professional association Web sites, and forums. Internet forums, also called message boards, are online discussion groups where anyone may post and read messages. Use forums specific to your profession or to career-related topics to post questions or messages and to read about other peoples' job searches or career experiences.

In job databases, remember that job listings may be posted by field or discipline, so begin your search using keywords. Some Web sites provide national or local classified listings and allow job seekers to post their resumes online. When searching employment databases on the Internet, it usually is possible to send your resume to an employer by e-mail or to post it online.

CareerOneStop is a database consisting of three separate career resource tools. It can be accessed on the Internet at: <http://www.CareerOneStop.org>, or by telephone at: (877) 348-0502. Alternatively, each resource tool can be accessed directly at its own Internet address.

America's Job Bank allows you to search through a database of more than 1 million jobs nationwide, create and post your resume online, and set up an automated job search. The database contains a wide range of mostly full-time private sector jobs that are available all over the country. Job seekers can access America's Job Bank at: <http://www.ajb.org>.

America's Career InfoNet provides information on educational, licensing, and certification requirements for different occupations by State. It also provides information on wages, cost of living, and employment trends, and helps job seekers identify their skills and write resumes and cover letters. Job seekers can access America's Career InfoNet at: <http://www.acinet.org>.

America's Service Locator provides listings of local employment service offices which help job seekers find jobs and help employers find qualified workers at no cost to either. At the State employment service office, an interviewer will determine if you are "job ready" or if you need help from counseling and testing services to assess your occupational aptitudes and interests and to help you choose and prepare for a career. After you are "job ready," you may examine available job listings and select openings that interest you. A staff member can then describe the job openings in detail and arrange for interviews with prospective employers. Job seekers can access *America's Service Locator* at: <http://www.servicelocator.org>. A list of offices is also in the State government telephone listings under "Job Service" or "Employment."

Using Internet Resources to Plan your Future, a U.S. Department of Labor publication, offers advice on organizing your Internet job search. It is primarily intended to provide instruction for job seekers on how to use the Internet to their best advantage, but recruiters and other career service industry professionals will find information here to help them also. *How to Use the Internet in your Job Search*; *The Job Search Process*; and the *Career-Related Pages*, other U.S. Department of Labor Internet publications, each discusses specific steps that job seekers can follow to identify employment opportunities. Included are daily tips and hints, plus a large database of links and job search engines. Check with your State employment service office, or order a copy of these and other publications from the U.S. Government Printing Office's Superintendent of Documents. Telephone: (202) 512-1800. Internet: <http://bookstore.gpo.gov> or <http://www.doleta.gov>.

State employment service offices. The State employment service, sometimes called the Job Service, operates in coordination with the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. Local offices, found nationwide, help job seekers to find jobs and help employers to find qualified workers at no cost to either. To find the office nearest you, look in the State government telephone listings under "Job Service" or "Employment."

Job matching and referral. At the State employment service office, an interviewer will determine if you are "job ready" or if you need help from counseling and testing services to assess your occupational aptitudes and interests and to help you choose and prepare for a career. After you are

"job ready," you may examine available job listings and select openings that interest you. A staff member can then describe the job openings in detail and arrange for interviews with prospective employers.

Services for special groups. By law, veterans are entitled to priority for job placement at State employment service centers. If you are a veteran, a veterans' employment representative can inform you of available assistance and help you to deal with problems.

State employment service offices refer people to opportunities available under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. WIA reforms Federal employment, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation programs to create an integrated, "one-stop" system of workforce investment and education activities for adults and youths. Services are provided to employers and job seekers, including adults, dislocated workers, and youths. WIA's primary purpose is to increase the employment, retention, skills, and earnings of participants. These programs help to prepare people to participate in the State's workforce, increase their employment and earnings potential, improve their educational and occupational skills, and reduce their dependency on welfare, which will improve the quality of the workforce and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the Nation's economy.

Federal Government. Information on obtaining a position with the Federal Government is available from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) through USAJOBS, the Federal Government's official employment information system. This resource for locating and applying for job opportunities can be accessed through the Internet at <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov> or through an interactive voice response telephone system at (703) 724-1850 or TDD (978) 461-8404. These numbers are not tollfree, and charges may result.

Professional associations. Many professions have associations that offer employment information, including career planning, educational programs, job listings, and job placement. To use these services, associations usually require that you be a member; information can be obtained directly from an association through the Internet, by telephone, or by mail.

Labor unions. Labor unions provide various employment services to members, including apprenticeship programs that teach a specific trade or skill. Contact the appropriate labor union or State apprenticeship council for more information.

Private employment agencies and career consultants. These agencies can be helpful, but they may charge you for their services. Most operate on a commission basis, with the fee dependent upon a percentage of the salary paid to a successful applicant. You or the hiring company will pay the fee. Find out the exact cost and who is responsible for paying associated fees before using the service.

Although employment agencies can help you save time and contact employers who otherwise might be difficult to locate, the costs may outweigh the benefits if you are responsible for the fee. Contacting employers directly often will generate the same type of leads that a private employment agency will provide. Consider any guarantees that the agency offers when determining if the service is worth the cost.

Community agencies. Many nonprofit organizations, including religious institutions and vocational rehabilitation agencies, offer counseling, career development, and job placement services, generally targeted to a particular group, such as women, youths, minorities, ex-offenders, or older workers.

Applying for a job

Resumes and application forms. Resumes and application forms are two ways to provide employers with written evidence of your qualifications and skills. Generally, the same information appears on both the resume and the application form, but the way in which it is presented differs. Some employers prefer a resume and others require an application form. The accompanying box presents the basic information you should include in your resume.

There are many ways of organizing a resume; choose the format that best showcases your skills and experience. It may be helpful to look for examples on the Internet or in books at your local library or bookstore. Typically, an employer has a very limited amount of time to review your resume. It is important to make sure it is clear and concise and highlights your skills and experiences effectively through the use of formatting, ordering, and headings.

Many employers scan resumes into databases, which they then search for specific keywords or phrases. The keywords are usually nouns referring to experience, education, personal characteristics, or industry buzz words. Identify keywords by reading the job description and qualifications; use the same words in your resume that are used in the job ad. For example, if the job description includes customer service tasks, use the words “customer service” on your resume. Scanners sometimes misread paper resumes, which could mean some of your keywords don’t get into the database. So, if you know that your resume will be scanned, and you have the option, e-mail an electronic version. If you must submit a paper resume, make it scannable by using a simple font and avoiding underlines, italics, and graphics. It is also a good idea to send a traditionally formatted resume along with your scannable resume, with a note on each marking its purpose.

What usually goes into a resume

- Name, address, e-mail address, and telephone number.
- Employment objective. State the type of work or specific job you are seeking.
- Education, including school name and address, dates of attendance, major, and highest grade completed or degree awarded. Consider including any courses or areas of focus that might be relevant to the position.
- Experience, paid and volunteer. For each job, include the job title, name and location of employer, and dates of employment. Briefly describe your job duties.
- Special skills, computer skills, proficiency in foreign languages, achievements, and membership in organizations.
- References, only when requested.
- Keep it short; only one page for less experienced applicants.
- Avoid long paragraphs; use bullets to highlight key skills and accomplishments.
- Have several people review your resume for any spelling or grammatical errors.
- Print it on high quality paper.

When you fill out an application form, make sure you fill it out completely and follow all instructions. Do not omit any requested information and make sure that the information you provide is correct.

Cover letters. A cover letter is sent with a resume or application form, as a way of introducing yourself to prospective employers. As with your resume, it may be helpful to look for examples on the Internet or in books at your local library or bookstore, but be sure not to copy letters directly from other sources. Your cover letter should be original, capture the employer’s attention,

follow a business letter format, and usually should include the following information:

- Name and address of the specific person to whom the letter is addressed.
- Reason for your interest in the company or position.
- Your main qualifications for the position.
- Request for an interview.
- Your home and work telephone numbers.

If you send a scannable resume, you should also include a scannable cover letter, which is created similarly to a scannable resume, by avoiding graphics, fancy fonts, italics, and underlines.

Interviewing. An interview gives you the opportunity to showcase your qualifications to an employer, so it pays to be well prepared. The information in the accompanying box provides some helpful hints.

Job interview tips

Preparation:

- Learn about the organization.
- Have a specific job or jobs in mind.
- Review your qualifications for the job.
- Prepare answers to broad questions about yourself.
- Review your resume.
- Practice an interview with a friend or relative.
- Arrive before the scheduled time of your interview.

Personal appearance:

- Be well groomed.
- Dress appropriately.
- Do not chew gum or smoke.

The interview:

- Relax and answer each question concisely.
- Respond promptly.
- Use good manners.
- Learn the name of your interviewer and greet him or her with a firm handshake.
- Use proper English—avoid slang.
- Be cooperative and enthusiastic.
- Use body language to show interest.
- Ask questions about the position and the organization, but avoid questions whose answers can easily be found on the company Web site. Also avoid asking questions about salary and benefits unless a job offer is made.
- Thank the interviewer when you leave and, as a follow-up, in writing.

Test (if employer gives one):

- Listen closely to instructions.
- Read each question carefully.
- Write legibly and clearly.
- Budget your time wisely and don’t dwell on one question.

Information to bring to an interview:

- Social Security card.
- Government-issued identification (driver’s license).
- Resume. Although not all employers require applicants to bring a resume, you should be able to furnish the interviewer information about your education, training, and previous employment.
- References. Employers typically require three references. Get permission before using anyone as a reference. Make sure that they will give you a good reference. Try to avoid using relatives as references.
- Transcripts. Employers may require an official copy of transcripts to verify grades, coursework, dates of attendance, and highest grade completed or degree awarded.

Evaluating a job offer

Once you receive a job offer, you are faced with a difficult decision and must evaluate the offer carefully. Fortunately, most organizations will not expect you to accept or reject an offer immediately.

There are many issues to consider when assessing a job offer. Will the organization be a good place to work? Will the job be interesting? Are there opportunities for advancement? Is the salary fair? Does the employer offer good benefits? If you have not already figured out exactly what you want, the following discussion may help you to develop a set of criteria for judging job offers, whether you are starting a career, reentering the labor force after a long absence, or planning a career change.

The organization. Background information on an organization can help you to decide whether it is a good place for you to work. Factors to consider include the organization's business or activity, financial condition, age, size, and location.

You generally can get background information on an organization, particularly a large organization, on its Internet site or by telephoning its public relations office. A public company's annual report to the stockholders tells about its corporate philosophy, history, products or services, goals, and financial status. Most government agencies can furnish reports that describe their programs and missions. Press releases, company newsletters or magazines, and recruitment brochures also can be useful. Ask the organization for any other items that might interest a prospective employee. If possible, speak to current or former employees of the organization.

Background information on the organization may be available at your public or school library. If you cannot get an annual report, check the library for reference directories that may provide basic facts about the company, such as earnings, products and services, and number of employees. Some directories widely available in libraries either in print or as online databases include:

- *Dun & Bradstreet's Million Dollar Directory*
- *Standard and Poor's Register of Corporations*
- *Mergent's Industry Review (formerly Moody's Industrial Manual)*
- *Thomas Register of American Manufacturers*
- *Ward's Business Directory*

Stories about an organization in magazines and newspapers can tell a great deal about its successes, failures, and plans for the future. You can identify articles on a company by looking under its name in periodical or computerized indexes in libraries. However, it probably will not be useful to look back more than 2 or 3 years.

The library also may have government publications that present projections of growth for the industry in which the organization is classified. Long-term projections of employment and output for detailed industries, covering the entire U.S. economy, are developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and revised every 2 years. See the November 2005 *Monthly Labor Review* for the most recent projections, covering the 2004-14 period, on the Internet at: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/mlrhome.htm>. Trade magazines also may include articles on the trends for specific industries.

Career centers at colleges and universities often have information on employers that is not available in libraries. Ask a career center representative how to find out about a particular organization.

Does the organization's business or activity match your own interests and beliefs?

It is easier to apply yourself to the work if you are enthusiastic about what the organization does.

How will the size of the organization affect you?

Large firms generally offer a greater variety of training programs and career paths, more managerial levels for advancement, and better employee benefits than do small firms. Large employers also may have more advanced technologies. However, many jobs in large firms tend to be highly specialized.

Jobs in small firms may offer broader authority and responsibility, a closer working relationship with top management, and a chance to clearly see your contribution to the success of the organization.

Should you work for a relatively new organization or one that is well established?

New businesses have a high failure rate, but for many people, the excitement of helping to create a company and the potential for sharing in its success more than offset the risk of job loss. However, it may be just as exciting and rewarding to work for a young firm that already has a foothold on success.

Does it make a difference if the company is private or public?

An individual or a family may control a privately owned company and key jobs may be reserved for relatives and friends. A board of directors responsible to the stockholders controls a publicly owned company and key jobs usually are open to anyone.

Is the organization in an industry with favorable long-term prospects?

The most successful firms tend to be in industries that are growing rapidly.

Nature of the job. Even if everything else about the job is attractive, you will be unhappy if you dislike the day-to-day work. Determining in advance whether you will like the work may be difficult. However, the more you find out about the job before accepting or rejecting the offer, the more likely you are to make the right choice. Actually working in the industry and, if possible, for the company would provide considerable insight. You can gain work experience through part-time, temporary, or summer jobs, or through internship or work-study programs while in school, all of which can lead to permanent job offers.

Where is the job located?

If the job is in another section of the country, you need to consider the cost of living, the availability of housing and transportation, and the quality of educational and recreational facilities in that section of the country. Even if the job location is in your area, you should consider the time and expense of commuting.

Does the work match your interests and make good use of your skills?

The duties and responsibilities of the job should be explained in enough detail to answer this question.

How important is the job in this company?

An explanation of where you fit in the organization and how you are supposed to contribute to its overall objectives should give you an idea of the job's importance.

Are you comfortable with the hours?

Most jobs involve regular hours—for example, 40 hours a week, during the day, Monday through Friday. Other jobs require night, weekend, or holiday work. In addition, some jobs routinely require overtime to meet deadlines or sales or production goals, or to better serve customers. Consider the effect that the work hours will have on your personal life.

How long do most people who enter this job stay with the company?

High turnover can mean dissatisfaction with the nature of the work or something else about the job.

Opportunities offered by employers. A good job offers you opportunities to learn new skills, increase your earnings, and rise to positions of greater authority, responsibility, and prestige. A lack of opportunities can dampen interest in the work and result in frustration and boredom.

The company should have a training plan for you. What valuable new skills does the company plan to teach you?

The employer should give you some idea of promotion possibilities within the organization. What is the next step on the career ladder? If you have to wait for a job to become vacant before you can be promoted, how long does this usually take? When opportunities for advancement do arise, will you compete with applicants from outside the company? Can you apply for jobs for which you qualify elsewhere within the organization, or is mobility within the firm limited?

Salaries and benefits. Wait for the employer to introduce these subjects. Some companies will not talk about pay until they have decided to hire you. In order to know if their offer is reasonable, you need a rough estimate of what the job should pay. You may have to go to several sources for this information. Try to find family, friends, or acquaintances who recently were hired in similar jobs. Ask your teachers and the staff in placement

offices about starting pay for graduates with your qualifications. Help-wanted ads in newspapers sometimes give salary ranges for similar positions. Check the library or your school's career center for salary surveys such as those conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers or various professional associations.

If you are considering the salary and benefits for a job in another geographic area, make allowances for differences in the cost of living, which may be significantly higher in a large metropolitan area than in a smaller city, town, or rural area.

You also should learn the organization's policy regarding overtime. Depending on the job, you may or may not be exempt from laws requiring the employer to compensate you for overtime. Find out how many hours you will be expected to work each week and whether you receive overtime pay or compensatory time off for working more than the specified number of hours in a week.

Also take into account that the starting salary is just that—the start. Your salary should be reviewed on a regular basis; many organizations do it every year. How much can you expect to earn after 1, 2, or 3 or more years? An employer cannot be specific about the amount of pay if it includes commissions and bonuses.

Benefits also can add a lot to your base pay, but they vary widely. Find out exactly what the benefit package includes and how much of the cost you must bear.

National, State, and metropolitan area data from the Bureau's National Compensation Survey are available from:

- Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Compensation Levels and Trends, 2 Massachusetts Ave. NE., Room 4175, Washington, DC 20212-0001. Telephone: (202) 691-6199. Internet: <http://www.bls.gov/ncs>.

Data on earnings by detailed occupation from the Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey are available from:

- Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections, 2 Massachusetts Ave. NE., Room 2135, Washington, DC 20212-0001. Telephone: (202) 691-6569. Internet: <http://www.bls.gov/oes>.